

bmj.com news roundup

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Health authority employing HIV positive dentist wins anonymity

An English health authority that has not contacted former patients of an HIV positive dentist nearly a year after it learned of his HIV status won an appeal court ruling last week barring the media from identifying it.

No decision has yet been taken on whether to get in touch with patients of the dentist, who has now developed AIDS, and offer them HIV testing. Official guidelines under which patients of HIV positive health workers who perform invasive procedures are contacted and offered counselling and testing are about to be superseded by new guidance, but not until mid-March at the earliest.

Three appeal court judges, headed by the master of the rolls, Lord Phillips, set aside a ban on identifying the man's specialty but overturned a High Court ruling allowing the *Mail on Sunday*, which wants to highlight the fact that patients have been kept in the dark, to name the authority. The paper is not seeking to name the dentist, "H," whose identity remains protected by court order.

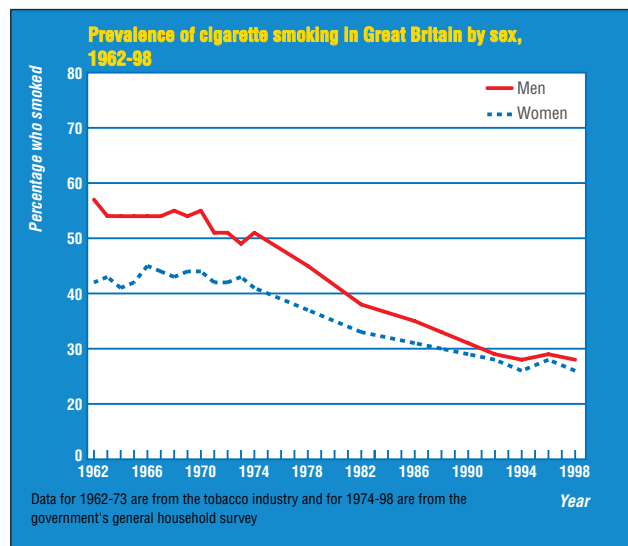
The authority had argued that naming it would cause "public panic and alarm, perhaps on an unprecedented scale."

Clare Dyer legal correspondent, *BMJ*

Embryos screened for gene mutation linked to early onset Alzheimer's

A 30 year old woman with a genetic disorder linked to early onset of Alzheimer's disease has become the first to successfully undergo in vitro fertilisation with preimplantation genetic diagnosis of the embryos to avoid passing the defect on to her children (*JAMA* 2002;287:1018-21).

The woman, who is asymptomatic, is a geneticist. She carried a mutation in the amyloid precursor protein (APP) gene. The patient opted for genetic testing after realising that three out of six



Five million deaths despite warning from Royal College of Physicians 40 years ago

Exactly 40 years after the Royal College of Physicians warned the public that smoking causes lung cancer, the college is pressing the UK government to end "ministerial indifference and inaction" over a habit that has killed millions of Britons.

In his foreword to a booklet launched this week, Professor George Alberti said that the government can claim little credit for the waning popularity of cigarettes—people have been following their doctor's advice or public health messages. "The current government is more committed to action ... than any before, yet it too has faltered," he said.

The booklet, entitled *Forty Fatal Years*, was jointly prepared with the health campaign group Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) to mark 7 March 1962, when the landmark report by the college, *Smoking and Health*, was produced.

Katherine Burke London

of her family members had symptoms of early onset of the disease.

The woman underwent in vitro fertilisation with her husband's sperm and had preimplantation genetic testing of the resultant embryos at the Reproductive Genetics Institute in Chicago, Illinois. She underwent two cycles of in vitro fertilisation and preimplantation genetic diagnosis and ultimately was implanted with four embryos free of the APP mutation.

This resulted in a pregnancy with a single fetus that had been confirmed to be free of the mutation by chorionic villus testing. The infant is now 17 months old and has had a blood test, which further confirmed the absence of the mutation.

The woman, now aged 33, is currently undergoing another cycle of fertilisation treatment with genetic testing.

Deborah Josefson Nebraska

Report calls for safeguards for children in NHS in Wales

Sweeping changes designed to safeguard children treated by the NHS in Wales are urged in a new report.

The report recommends establishing a director of children's healthcare services, an all-Wales NHS child protection organisation, two new charters for children, police checking of staff who come into contact with children, and protection of NHS whistleblowers.

The review, carried out by a panel of experts and chaired by Lord Carlile QC, was set up in the wake of the north Wales child abuse inquiry, which heard allegations from former inpatients of

a child and adolescent mental health unit in North Wales.

Its 150 recommendations to the Welsh Assembly also include medical access to child protection registers, some access to health records by social workers, the establishment of complaints officers in every NHS trust, and a network of children's advocates.

Roger Dobson Abergavenny

Review of Safeguards for Children and Young People Treated and Cared for by the NHS in Wales is accessible at www.wales.gov.uk

Help the Aged accuses NHS of discrimination

Half (51%) of the United Kingdom's population believes that older people are being treated as if they are on the scrapheap, a survey by Help the Aged and National Opinion Poll has found.

The survey results come as the charity, in partnership with British Gas, launched its "Scrap It" campaign to expose and challenge age discrimination.

Help the Aged has also produced a report highlighting the age discrimination that older people face in the public services, including the NHS. It cites three separate studies showing the level of discrimination in the health service.

- The National Confidential Enquiry into Perioperative Deaths, 1999, showed that only 4% of older patients who died after surgery had been admitted to a high dependency unit, even though admission is considered good policy

- A survey of GPs carried out by Age Concern in May 2000 showed that upper age limits exist for several procedures, including heart bypass, kidney dialysis, and routine breast screening

- The Association of Community Health Councils' *Casualty Watch* survey in 2001 showed that patients aged over 60 had to wait an average of almost five hours for treatment in accident and emergency departments, compared with an average wait of less than three hours for patients aged under 40.

The report also highlights the